

Owsley Stanley

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Augustus Owsley Stanley III (January 19, 1935 – March 12, 2011) was an American audio engineer and clandestine chemist. He was a key figure in the San Francisco Bay Area hippie movement during the 1960s and played a pivotal role in the decade's counterculture. Under the professional name **Bear**, he was the

soundman for the rock band the Grateful Dead, whom he met when Ken Kesey invited them to an Acid Test party. As their sound engineer, Stanley frequently recorded live tapes behind his mixing board and developed their Wall of Sound sound system, one of the largest mobile public address systems ever constructed. Stanley also designed the band's trademark skull logo.^[1]

Stanley was the first known private individual to manufacture mass quantities of LSD.^{[2][3][4]} By his own account, between 1965 and 1967, Stanley produced no less than 500 grams of LSD, amounting to a

little more than five million doses.^[5]

He died in a car accident in Australia (where he had taken citizenship in 1996) on March 12, 2011.^{[4][6][7]}

Ancestry

Stanley was the son of a political family from Kentucky. His father was a government

Owsley Stanley



Stanley in 1967 at his arraignment

Born	Augustus Owsley Stanley III January 19, 1935
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attorney. His grandfather, A. Owsley Stanley, a member of the United States Senate after serving as Governor of Kentucky and in the U.S. House of Representatives, campaigned against Prohibition in the 1920s.^[4]

Biography

	<u>Kentucky</u> ,
Died	March 12, 2011 (aged 76) <u>Queensland</u> , Australia
Cause of death	<u>Car accident</u>
Nationality	American
Other names	Bear
Citizenship	Naturalised Australia
Occupation	Audio engineer
Known for	<u>LSD</u> , <u>Wall of</u>

Early life

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At an early age, he committed himself to St. Elizabeths

Hospital in

Washington, D.C.^[8]

Without having

graduated high

school, he studied

engineering at the

University of Virginia for a year,

maintaining a 3.4 grade point average with

minimal effort before dropping out due to

his disinclination for slide rules and

mechanical drawing.^[9] Despite his dearth

	<u>Sound</u>
Spouse(s)	Sheilah Stanley
Children	4
Relatives	<u>Augustus</u> <u>O. Stanley</u> , grandfather
Website	<u>www</u> <u>.thebear</u> <u>.org</u>

of formal education, he secured a position as a test engineer with Rocketdyne in Los Angeles; in this capacity, he worked on the SM-64 Navaho supersonic cruise missile.

In June 1956, he enlisted in the United States Air Force as an electronics specialist, serving for 18 months (including stints at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory and Edwards Air Force Base's Rocket Engine Test Facility) before being discharged in 1958. During his service, he secured an amateur radio license and a general radiotelephone operator license.

Later, inspired by a 1958 performance of the Bolshoi Ballet, he studied ballet in Los

Angeles, supporting himself for a time as a professional dancer.^[10] In 1963, he enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley, where he became involved in the psychoactive drug scene. He dropped out after a semester, took a technical job at KGO-TV, and began producing LSD in a small lab located in the bathroom of a house near campus; his makeshift laboratory was raided by police on February 21, 1965. He beat the charges and successfully sued for the return of his equipment. The police were looking for methamphetamine but found only LSD, which was not illegal at the time.

Stanley returned to Los Angeles to pursue the production of LSD. He used his Berkeley lab to buy 500 grams of lysergic acid monohydrate, the basis for LSD. His first shipment arrived on March 30, 1965 and he produced 300,000 hits (270 micrograms each) of LSD by May 1965; then he returned to the Bay Area.

In September 1965, Stanley became the primary LSD supplier to Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters. By this time, Sandoz LSD was hard to come by, and "Owsley Acid" had become the new standard. He was featured (most prominently his freak-out at the Muir Beach Acid Test in

November 1965) in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968), Tom Wolfe's book detailing the history of Kesey and the Merry Pranksters. Stanley attended the Watts Acid Test on February 12, 1966 with his new apprentice Tim Scully, and provided the LSD.

Stanley also provided LSD to the Beatles during filming of *Magical Mystery Tour* (1967),^[11] and former Three Dog Night singer Chuck Negron has noted that Owsley and Leary gave Negron's band free LSD.^[12]

Involvement with the Grateful Dead ...

Stanley met the members of the Grateful Dead during 1965.^[13] He both financed them and worked with them as their first soundman.^[14] Along with his close friend Bob Thomas, Stanley designed the band's iconic lightning bolt-skull logo.^[1] The lightning bolt design came to him after seeing a similar design on a roadside advertisement: "One day in the rain, I looked out the side and saw a sign along the freeway which was a circle with a white bar across it. The top of the circle was orange, and the bottom blue. I couldn't read the name of the firm, and so was just looking at the shape. A thought occurred to me: if the orange were red and the bar

across were a lightning bolt cutting across at an angle, then we would have a very nice, unique and highly identifiable mark to put on the equipment."^[1]

During his time as the sound engineer for the Grateful Dead, Stanley started what became the long-term practice of recording the Dead while they rehearsed and performed. His initial motivation for creating what he dubbed his "sonic journal" was to improve his ability to mix the sound, but the fortuitous result was an extensive trove of recordings from the heyday of the San Francisco concert/dance scene in the mid-1960s.

(Another reason for the first recordings was that Stanley had hearing damage in one ear from a swimming-pool diving accident when he was 19, and wanted a way to check himself.^{[15][16]})

In addition to his large archive of Dead performances, Stanley made numerous live recordings of other leading 1960s and 1970s artists appearing in San Francisco, including Quicksilver Messenger Service, Jefferson Airplane, early Jefferson Starship, Old & In the Way, Janis Joplin, Big Brother and the Holding Company, Taj Mahal, Santana, Miles Davis, the Flying

Burrito Brothers, Jimi Hendrix, Johnny Cash, and Blue Cheer.^[6]

Richmond LSD lab

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Stanley and Scully built electronic equipment for the Grateful Dead until late spring 1966. At this point, Stanley rented a house in Point Richmond, Richmond, California. He, Scully, and Melissa Cargill (Stanley's girlfriend and a skilled chemist, introduced to Stanley by Susan Cowper, a former girlfriend) set up a lab in the basement. The Point Richmond lab turned out more than 300,000 tablets (270 micrograms each) of LSD, dubbed "White

Lightning". When LSD became illegal in California on October 6, 1966, Scully decided to set up a new lab in Denver, Colorado. The new lab was set up in the basement of a house across the street from the Denver Zoo in early 1967.^[17]

In Denver, the trio was augmented by fellow Berkeley dropout Rhoney Gissen, who joined the manufacturing effort and began a relationship with Stanley (concurrent with Stanley's relationship with Cargill and Cargill's separate relationship with Jefferson Airplane bassist Jack Casady.) that endured through the early 1970s; although they never married,

Gissen would eventually take Stanley's surname. Stanley's scientific tutelage influenced Gissen's decision to return to her formal studies and pursue the profession of dentistry; their son, Starfinder, would go on to earn zoology and veterinary medicine degrees from Cornell University and the University of Pennsylvania.^[18]

Legal trouble and continued involvement with the Grateful Dead ...

A psychedelic known as STP was distributed in the summer of 1967 in 20 mg tablets and quickly acquired a bad

reputation (later research in normal volunteers showed that 20 mg was over six times the dose required to produce hallucinogenic effects, and its slow onset of action may have caused street users to take even more than a single tablet).^[19]

Stanley and Scully made trial batches of STP in 10 mg tablets and then of STP mixed with LSD in a few hundred yellow tablets, but soon ceased production of STP. Stanley and Scully produced about 196 grams of LSD in 1967, but 96 grams of this was confiscated by the police.

In late 1967, Stanley's La Espiral, Orinda, lab was raided by police; he was found in

possession of 350,000 doses of LSD and 1,500 doses of STP. His defense was that the illegal substances were for personal use, but he was found guilty and sentenced to three years in prison. The same year, Stanley officially shortened his name to "Owsley Stanley". After he was released from prison, Stanley resumed working for the Grateful Dead as their live sound engineer. On January 31, 1970, at 3:00 am, 19 members of the Grateful Dead and crew were arrested for possession of a variety of drugs at a French Quarter hotel after returning from a concert at The Warehouse in New Orleans.

According to Rolling Stone,^[20] everyone in the band except Ron "Pigpen" McKernan and Tom Constanten - neither of whom used psychedelic drugs - was included in the arrest, along with several members of their retinue, including Stanley and some locals. Stanley was charged with illegal possession of narcotics, dangerous non-narcotics, LSD, and barbiturates. Another West Coast-based rock band, Jefferson Airplane, had been arrested two weeks earlier in the same situation. According to an article in the Baton Rouge State Times, Stanley identified himself to the police as "The King of Acid" and technician of the band. The 1970 Grateful Dead song

"Truckin'" is based on the incident (*"Busted, down on Bourbon Street / Set up, like a bowling pin / Knocked down, it gets to wearing thin / They just won't let you be"*).^[21]

Stanley was confined to federal prison from 1970 to 1972, after a federal judge intervened and revoked his release from the 1967 case. Stanley took advantage of the opportunity there to learn the trade of metalwork and jewelry-making.^[4]

Immediately following his release, Stanley resumed working for the Grateful Dead as a roadie and sound engineer in the

summer of 1972. As much of his portfolio had been delegated to as many as four sound engineers during his prison sentence, he struggled to regain his past influence among the band and support staff. In a later interview with Dennis McNally, he opined that he received "just a taste" of his previous position; according to Stanley, "I found on my release from jail that the crew, most of whom had been hired in my absence, did not want anything changed. No improvements for the sound, no new gear, nothing different on stage. They wanted to maintain the same old same old which under their limited abilities, they had memorized to the point

where they could sleepwalk through shows. Bob Matthews, who had been mixing since my departure, did not want to completely relinquish the mixing desk, which was a total pain in the ass for me, since he was basically a studio engineer and no match for my live mixing ability." The situation was exacerbated by his disdain for the coarse language and deleterious drugs (most notably alcohol and cocaine) favored by the band's physically imposing roadies, many of whom perceived themselves as "macho cowboys" in contrast to Stanley's diminutive stature and erudite mien.

The tensions culminated in a logistical mishap at an October 1972 concert at Vanderbilt University when students recruited by Stanley to deputize for an absentee Matthews absconded with half of the band's PA system, resulting in a fellow employee throwing Stanley into a water cooler. The altercation led Stanley to request the formal codification of his perceived managerial power over the equipment staff, including unprecedented hire/fire privileges.^[22]

Although Stanley stopped touring with the band following their refusal of his demands, he continued to be employed by

the Grateful Dead through their 1975 hiatus in a more limited capacity. During this period, he served as lead designer of the band's Wall of Sound PA system and assisted Phil Lesh in salvaging the technically deficient recordings assembled for Steal Your Face (1976), a poorly-received live album culled from the final October 1974 pre-hiatus shows at Winterland Ballroom.^[23]

Post–Grateful Dead career

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In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Stanley briefly served as the mixing engineer for Jefferson Starship, and also grew and sold

marijuana from his Marin County garden. Stanley moved to Australia in 1982, and frequently returned to the United States to sell his jewelry (which commanded high prices) on Grateful Dead tours. He retained backstage access during this period, and his clientele included such notable figures such as Keith Richards.^[2]

Stanley's level of access to the group's inner echelon (including complimentary food from the band's caterers) was somewhat controversial among the band's employees, with one staffer opining that "he had the sales tactics of a Mumbai street peddler"; on one occasion, Garcia

and Weir were forced to intervene when Stanley provoked Chelsea Clinton's secret service agent as he attempted to conduct business with the then-First Daughter.^[24]

Notwithstanding his tour activities, Stanley made his first public appearance in decades at the Australian ethnobotanical conference *Entheogenesis Australis* in 2009, giving three talks during his time in Melbourne.^[25]

Personal life and death

Wikinews has related news:

[Owsley Stanley, icon of 1960s
counterculture, dies at 76](#)

Stanley believed a "thermal cataclysm" related to climate change would soon render the Northern Hemisphere largely uninhabitable, and moved to Australia in 1982. He became a naturalized Australian citizen in 1996. Stanley lived with his wife Sheilah (a former clerk in the Grateful Dead's ticket office) in the bush of Tropical North Queensland, where he worked to create sculpture, and wearable art.^{[3][26]}

From at least the mid 1960s until his death, Stanley practiced and advocated an

all-meat diet, believing that humans are naturally carnivores.^[3]

Stanley died after a car accident in Australia on Saturday, March 12, 2011,^[4] not Sunday, March 13, as reported in most publications^{[6][7][8][27][28]} (a widely propagated error stemming from the Monday release to the press of the initial family statement, which was written on Sunday, stating he "died yesterday"). The statement released on behalf of Stanley's family said the car crash occurred near his home, on a rural stretch of highway near Mareeba, Queensland. He was survived by his wife Sheilah, four children, eight

grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

His ashes were placed on the soundboard at the Grateful Dead 50th anniversary shows in Chicago, on July 3–5, 2015.^[29]

Owsley Stanley Foundation

After Stanley's death in 2011, his family and some close friends created a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization called the Owsley Stanley Foundation. The foundation is dedicated to restoring and preserving the archive of Stanley's recordings, which he called his "sonic journals".^{[30][31][32][33]}

As part of this work, several of the recordings have been released commercially on CD:

- *Bear's Sonic Journals: Never the Same Way Once* – Doc Watson and Merle Watson – 2017^{[34][35][36]}
- *Bear's Sonic Journals: Fillmore East, February 1970* – The Allman Brothers Band – 2018^[37]
- *Bear's Sonic Journals: Before We Were Them* – Jorma Kaukonen and Jack Casady (i.e. Hot Tuna) – 2019^[38]
- *Bear's Sonic Journals: Dawn of the New Riders of the Purple Sage* – New Riders of the Purple Sage – 2020^[39]

- *Bear's Sonic Journals: Found in the Ozone – Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen – 2020^[40]*

In popular culture

In literature

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- Owsley's association with Ken Kesey and the Grateful Dead is described in Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool Aid Acid Test* (1968).
- Stanley's incarceration is lamented in Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971) as one of the many signs of the death of the 1960s.^[41]

In music

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- A newspaper headline identifying Stanley as an "LSD Millionaire" ran in the Los Angeles Times the day before the state of California, on October 6, 1966, criminalized the drug. The headline inspired the Grateful Dead song, "Alice D. Millionaire".^[13]
- Stanley is mentioned by his first name in the song "Who Needs the Peace Corps?" by Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention, which first appeared on the band's album We're Only in It for the Money (1968) ("I'll go to Frisco, buy a wig and sleep on Owsley's floor.").^{[42][43][44][45][46][47]}

- Stanley is referred to in Jefferson Airplane's song "Mexico" on the Early Flight (1974) album.
- Stanley is the subject of Spectrum (UK band)'s song "Owsley", which appears on their 1997 Forever Alien album and its precursor EP Songs For Owsley (1996). The latter was titled in tribute to Stanley.
- Stanley is the subject of The Masters Apprentices' song "Our Friend Owsley Stanley 3", which appears on their 1971 album Master's Apprentices.
- The Steely Dan song "Kid Charlemagne", from the album The Royal Scam (1976),

is loosely based on Stanley.^{[48][49][50][51]}

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External links

- [Owsley's website](#)
- "[For the unrepentant patriarch of LSD, long, strange trip winds back to Bay Area](#)" [San Francisco Chronicle](#) July 12, 2007
- [Obituary from Reuters.com](#)
- [Celebstoner.com report of Owsley Stanley's Death](#)

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